

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.113 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 23rd January 2020

Present (33): Chris Addis (Bothenhampton&Walditch PC); Will Austin (Bridport TC); Nick Boothroyd (Bridport); Monica Burt (BAOPF); Jackie Butcher (Mosterton); Kelvin Clayton (DC/BTC); Tim Christian (DCT); John Collingwood (Bridport); Colin Dival (Bridport); Maureen Dormer (Mosterton); Bob Driscoll (WATAG Chair); Anna Dunn (Chideock PC); Carolyn Emmett (Beaminster); Louise Ferguson (Bridport); Sheena Fox (Beaminster); Ian Gray (WATAG); Philip Hackett (Bridport); Sarah Herring (West Bay); Graham Lambert (Weymouth); Jacki Lambert (Weymouth); Leanne Rowland-Bright (First Control); Patrick Lilleyman (Bridport); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Bill Mellish (Labour); Chris Noon (Char Valley PC); John Pearson (Chideock); Pamela Reed (Mosterton); Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward); Billy Shearer (WATAG); Aaron Sparks (First); Guz Tidy (Loders); Chris Turner (Beaminster TC); Alan Williams (WATAG).

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Ardley, Sarah Carney, Richard Edwards, Sally Falkingham, Freda Hennessey, Margaret Hayward, Anna Lovell, David Marsh, Mary Marsh, Simon Newport, David Redgewell, Helen Reed, Tony Taylor.

2. **Minutes:** The minutes of the previous (112th) meeting were agreed and signed.

3. **Matters arising not covered later:** None.

4. **Future of the Bridport, Beaminster and Yeovil strategic route:** the news that First Wessex planned to withdraw their service 6 on 1 May had only emerged on 13 January. This strategic inter-urban route (so described by the then Dorset County Council in 2017) has seen a spiralling decline since then. WATAG are anxious to engage all stakeholders, hospitals, schools, town & parish councils in seeking to create a useful timetable and find financial support. Aaron Sparks confirmed that the 6A school journeys would remain and the journeys connecting to Weymouth College (the former 53) may be retained. Sheena Fox asked why the positioning journeys could not run in service. Information is needed to know what level of financial support and/or passenger growth would be required to make the service viable. The way in which the school service tendering was organised in 2017 had created the present problems. Obviating the change at Beaminster was desirable. The Mosterton representatives stressed that they were still in Dorset and were directed to health and other facilities in Dorset. As Crewkerne and Yeovil are over the border in Somerset, Tim Christian suggested that the Somerset councils needed to be involved. Gavin Maxwell stressed that the Health Care delivery system being developed in Dorset relied on good transport to access points. This was common to the four agencies involved. Bridport Hospital needed to retain ease of access. Bob Driscoll reminded the meeting of the history. During Summer 2017, Dorset County Council ran to the 'Damory' timetable. First then operated commercially south of Beaminster plus a shopping trip to Yeovil. DCC covered Beaminster to Crewkerne with some extensions. DCC decided to withdraw from bus operations and in October 2018 Buses of Somerset took over north of Beaminster but the peak journeys were taken off. DCC gave Yeovil College a minibus and were not considering the students any more. The result had been poor or non-existent connections into X51/53; loss of service through Netherbury and to serve Court Orchard. Bob had raised the matter with Chris Loder, our new MP and others asked how all this fitted with the integrated transport review held by DCC in February 2018. Discussions were ongoing. WATAG hoped for some input to this rather than just also being told what has been decided.

Leanne Rowland-Bright explained how control alert the First Wessex drivers when the Buses of Somerset bus is late in the evening.

5. Report from Dorset Travel: The attached report was read out. Aaron Sparks confirmed that the bus stop flag in South Street was in place. The chair had sought clarification. They were not referring to a WATAG suggestion for a meeting of stakeholders but to timetable suggestions that we had made in the past. They were unable to provide figures that they regarded as commercially sensitive to give a clearer picture and said TAGs would be hearing from Sue MacGowan about the EAP on access to rural services.

6. Councillors' Slot: Kelvin Clayton felt that he had not a lot to add about the EAP on Rural access to services. Its remit was narrow, eg looking at car schemes offering lifts for medical appointments, with little stress on the wider benefits of being able to get out and about. He wondered whether a public service (non-profit) model was needed.

7. Other Bus Matters.

(a) **First:** A limited Sunday X53 service between Bridport and Weymouth will start on Good Friday but the summer timetable will not start until 3 May. Representatives from Char Valley and Chideock enquired about the cost of extending this to Axminster. The pre-Christmas three hourly service cost about £300 per day to provide. Lyme Regis Park & Ride will start before Easter similar to last year. A figure was still needed for the cost of retiming the first bus to Axminster to connect into the Exeter train as some parishes might help. Concern was expressed that there was a lack of clarity about Sch/NSch variations as roadside publicity did not include dates for schools (and occasionally some schools were out of step with others); it was also unhelpful that the journeys that were 'split' with a ten minute wait at Colfox or Woodroffe showed the name of the school and not the final destination on the Real Time Information System. Aaron Sparks agreed and will try to get it sorted out. It did not help either that the First website and app did not always give the same information. Gavin Maxwell stressed that Dorset County Hospital runs a 24/7 operation and staff need access. Billy Shearer pointed out that Stagecoach SouthWest had a leaflet consulting on their proposed changes and asked whether First would do something similar.

(b) **Dorset Community Transport :** Tim Christian and NORDCAT had both been at an EAP meeting in December. DCT had also helped set up Linked-in. It was designed to make people aware of options where they live but was not able to arrange individual journeys. This was no help when someone needed urgently and unexpectedly to make a journey (eg to a medical appointment). It was linked to the Morebus call centre and operated 1000-1400. DCT had supplemented some services over Christmas or changed day (23 December in place of Boxing Day). From the beginning of the year DCT is able to accept bus passes on PlusBus. This is a discretionary decision by Dorset Council. For those without passes the flat fare has increased to £6 return. (There was discussion of the funding – was it national or Dorset Council money? – if the latter it was surmised that it came from a different budget). DCT had issued 225 user surveys and had about one third returned. Changes to the pattern from now were Bridport C (from Bride Valley) reverting to weekly on Wednesday instead of Wednesday/Saturday in alternate weeks. Bridport A & B – reduced to operate fortnightly on Wednesdays. Thanks to support from Devon County Council and Thorncombe Parish Council, the 14/688 services will continue through 2020. The fare has been raised from £2 to £2.50 (£1.80 to £2 for journeys within Devon). This was the first increase and Tim thought they would keep this for some time as it was easier to have fares in round amounts. Plans for a Plusbus for Health with the Beaminster/Maiden Newton surgery had been delayed as the person DCT was dealing with there had left.

8. Railway Operators

(a) **South Western Railway.** Andrew Ardley had sent the following remarks:

“Many people will no doubt have seen the coverage about SWR’s financial results and the future of the franchise. It is important to stress that the outcome of the negotiations with the DfT will not affect the level of service provision or staff – it is very much business as usual at this stage.

Whilst the lengthy December RMT strike is now over you may be aware that the RMT has balloted its members to renew the strike mandate for a further period. The result of the ballot is due this week. Even if the mandate is renewed it doesn't necessarily mean that strikes will be called again immediately.

You may also have seen that we have a new Managing Director at SWR, Mark Hopwood. A link to his week 2 message is here: <https://www.southwesternrailway.com/plan-for-improving-your-journeys>. Mark had also sent an initial letter to stakeholders which put an emphasis on improved performance. WATAG is now on the list for stakeholder communications.”

(b) **Great Western Railway.** Engineering work is taking place between Castle Cary and Weymouth until March which will provide passengers with a more reliable railway and faster journeys. Engineers will strengthen tunnels and bridges and refurbish and renew track on the Heart of Wessex line, which links Weymouth and Bristol. The main area of work is at Yetminster in Dorset where a 127-year-old bridge crossing the River Wriggle will be replaced. This requires the closure of the line between Yeovil Pen Mill and Weymouth on certain weekends and from Saturday 15 February to Friday 21 February when buses will replace trains. Full details are on a special web page - www.gwr.com/Wessex

9. **Community initiatives.** Bridport Town Council would continue to monitor the Number 7 until the end of the summer but passenger numbers were showing a gradual increase. Tim Christian said that DCT were still in conversations about possible involvement. Beaminster CB3: The vehicle had passed its inspection and everything was continuing.

10/11 Democratic Moment / AOB. It was noted that transport featured in the Dorset Council's Economic Growth Strategy, but this was not reflected in their current approach to buses. It was suggested that WATAG might wish to look at air travel after recent events at Flybe. WATAG will be present at Bridport Community Fair on 1 February.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.50 pm.

The next General Meeting (GM 114)
will be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport
at 6.30 pm on Thursday 26th March 2020

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Dorset Council Officer Report

Public Transport

First Wessex has advised us that they will be withdrawing service 6 from the beginning of May.

We have had a preliminary meeting with Buses of Somerset and they are going to look at options for the service (including the suggestion previously sent by WATAG).

We will be inviting stakeholders to meet with us when we have more clarity as to what could be run on the route, while still remaining within the terms of the contract we hold with Buses of Somerset.

Bus Stop Infrastructure

We have recently arranged the removal of an unused, damaged bus stop pole in South Street, Bridport. We do not routinely remove redundant poles but if anyone has concerns about a pole which is damaged or nearing the end of its life we can make arrangements for it to be made safe or removed. Dorset Council website has a reporting option where details can be recorded: <https://dorset-self.achieveservice.com/service/Report-other-highways-issue>

Cycling

The old railway line between Burton Road and West Bay – the cycle parking is to be installed by 24th January 2020.

East Road Roundabout Cycle Safety Scheme– Highways England/Connect have agreed the electric meter issue so Dorset Council will commence work to complete the surfacing, signing and roundabout re-landscaping on 9th March 2020. The scheme is expected to finish by 3rd April 2020. These dates are dependent on Highway England's road space booking system so may change slightly.

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Amanda Evans (Dorset Travel's Community Travel Engagement Officer) emailed the following clarifications before the meeting:

Public Transport: The suggestion referred to in the Officer Report is regarding timetable suggestions, but we will select and notify appropriate stakeholders once we have heard back from Buses of Somerset.

Bus Stop Infrastructure: The bus stop is opposite St Mary's Church. We received a report that the pole was damaged before the service change was made so we arranged for the removal. First Wessex will be putting a flag on a nearby lamppost so the stop can still be identified.